

“Staying Connected to Jesus”—John 15:4-5

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Staying Connected to Jesus”, is John 15:4-5 → Jesus says: *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

“If you don’t use it, you lose it.” This phrase rings true in so many areas of discipline in our lives. When a person has learned a function on a computer he may find it difficult to perform the same function months later because he hasn’t used it regularly. When’s the last you had a struggle entering a contact into your cell phone because it had been so long since you had done so? Do you remember all the knowledge you acquired in all those years of schooling as you were growing up? I think of the people who kept all those books from college only to use them later as booster seats for their children

because Sear & Roebuck and the phone company quit publishing catalogues. It is only that to which you stay connected in your everyday routines that you actually remember well and helps you to function properly.

In one sense Jesus applies this same principle to our spiritual lives in the text before us. He used the picture of a *vine* and its *branches* to describe our relationship to God as well as our growth and the fruit of good works which are produced in that relationship. He says in verse 5 of our text: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*

It is important to recognize to whom Jesus is referring in His description. He refers to *every branch in Me* (cf. John 15:2). He is speaking about Christians, those who live in a faith relationship with Him by repenting of their sins and trusting in His atoning sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. He is speaking about you and me.

However, just because you **consider yourself to be a Christian** doesn't mean that you are automatically connected to Him in a proper faith relationship. It is possible for a person who considers himself to be a Christian to ignore his connection to Jesus **as He defines it** in His written Word and lose his life eternally. This is the gist of Jesus'

words in Mark 16:16 → *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.* A living and active faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, to which your baptism connects you, is imperative. Notice the present tense in Jesus' words:

- *Whoever believes . . .* refers to **continuing in faith**, not simply having believed at some point in your life.
- *. . . and is baptized . . .* Notice it doesn't say "and has been baptized" at some point in your life. You are baptized so it will be displayed **in the present moment in your life.**

Thus, in His picture of our connection to Him, Jesus says that *if anyone does not abide in Him he is thrown away like a withered branch which is thrown into the fire and burned* (cf. John 15:6). Notice the serious consequences for those who claim to be in Christ but **refuse** to allow Him to *bear fruit* through them. He is describing being eternally cut off from God in hell.

How could such a thing happen to one who is in Christ? It happens by simply considering yourself to be a Christian while refusing to stay connected with Him according to His written Word. It is displayed by the fruit of living with apathy, complacency and a false sense of security. Jesus put it this way in Revelation 3:15-16 → *I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were*

*either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.* Your works are the fruit showing whether or not you are connected properly to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The temptation to disconnect yourself from Jesus, your Vine, happens in numerous ways:

- By the temptation of the devil, striving to get you to discredit faith in Christ **as He defines it in His written Word** and get you to claim faith in Christ **as you want to define it**. He knows that if you take control of your faith you will view it according to your relative sinfulness instead of according to the sinless Son of God, Jesus.
- By ignoring His means of grace in your life. Scripture tells you that the means through which Jesus graciously gives you His forgiveness of sins is the Gospel (cf. Romans 10:17), baptism (cf. Acts 2:38-39; 1 Peter 3:21), the Lord's Supper (cf. Matthew 26:26-28) and the absolution (cf. John 20:23). Refusing to partake regularly of these means of grace denies your identity in Christ by refusing to give as well as receive them in the gathered fellowship of believers.
- Disconnection with Jesus also happens when you refuse to constantly admit and confess your sins of self-righteous security, the rampant idolatry which fills your life and taking advantage of His grace to indulge the sinful nature (cf. 1 Peter 2:16).

In the midst of so much at work striving to sever you from your

spiritual life Source, you need help to stay connected. You cannot do it on your own.

Thus, He gives you His Holy Spirit who is constantly working on your behalf to keep you connected to Jesus, Who has freed you from the power of sin and the devil by His perfect sacrificial death and resurrection, freed up to serve God (i.e. *bear fruit*). Romans 8:26 says that *the Spirit helps us in our weakness*. At those times when you are tempted to stay away from God's written Word or the Lord's Supper or prayer the Holy Spirit will strengthen you to *submit yourselves . . . to God and resist the devil* with the promise that *he will flee from you* (cf. James 4:7). The Holy Spirit is constantly at work to keep your connected to Jesus.

God's desire is to produce fruit (i.e. good works) through us which brings the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation to others. Jesus says in verse 4 of our text: *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me*. Fruit is not something which is forced but rather flows naturally from the vine through the branches. Staying connected to Jesus as your complete Life Source, both physically and spiritually, is essential to fulfilling that for which you were created. In other words, *we are God's workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in*

*them* (cf. Ephesians 2:10).

As you stay connected to Jesus through His Word, prayer and living in His sacraments you will recognize His purpose for your life—to *bear much fruit* by . . .

- . . . trusting completely in Him as your eternal and earthly Life Source Who works His salvation in you. Philippians 2:12-13 tell you to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*** In others words, your salvation is at work through you as the Holy Spirit produces fruit in your life in your connection to the Vine, Jesus.
- . . . by reading His Word everyday to be nourished by Him for the purpose of living in service to Him and glorifying Him in every area of your life. Jesus says that His *Father is glorified when you bear much fruit and so prove to be His disciples* (cf. John 15:8).
- . . . by receiving forgiveness of your sins through His means of grace **regularly** with the gathered fellowship of believers.
- . . . by depending upon Him and submitting to Him in prayer.

Jesus is *the Vine*—our eternal and earthly Life Source. We are *the branches*—those who have no life apart from Him. Sever a vine in your garden and just watch how quickly the severed leaves wither and die. God is *the Vine-dresser* (cf. John 15:1)—the One Who cares for you

through the Holy Spirit so that you may have His Life and bring that Life to others. Living in this proper relationship between Jesus and yourself means that you recognize that the fruit producing happens **on His terms, not yours**. The constant connection with Jesus at this present moment of your life bears witness to His promise: *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (cf. Matthew 28:20). Amen.

*The **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

(Galatians 5:22-23)

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